



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release January 25, 1985

Megan Durham (202) 343-5634

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE PROPOSES CRITERIA FOR ESTABLISHING NON-TOXIC SHOT AREAS

The Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed specific criteria that would be used as guidelines in determining areas where lead poisoning of waterfowl is a significant problem and hunters should be required to use non-toxic (steel) shot.

"In the past, the manner in which non-toxic shot zones were established has varied by region and State. The purpose of this proposal is to establish criteria that are uniform, scientifically determined, and practical to implement," according to Service director Robert Jantzen.

The Service does not imply by this proposal that States with areas not meeting these criteria should be prohibited from requiring non-toxic shot. Individual States or Flyways may determine for their own management purposes that the use of lead shot in waterfowl feeding areas should be prohibited. The Service will continue to honor the States' requests to establish non-toxic shot zones in areas not meeting minimum Federal criteria.

The proposal includes "triggering" criteria for initial identification of areas where lead poisoning may be a problem, and "decision" criteria for determining whether these areas should be proposed for designation as non-toxic shot zones.

Counties or other areas would be identified under the triggering criteria if there is a harvest of 10 or more ducks or geese per square mile or 3 dead waterfowl diagnosed as having died from lead poisoning. Areas identified under these criteria would then be monitored to determine the incidence of lead shot in waterfowl gizzards and lead levels in the blood or livers of waterfowl. Sample sizes of 100 birds would be required for these studies. The Fish and Wildlife Service has determined that some 466 counties nationwide -- covering 67 percent of the U.S. waterfowl harvest -- would meet the criteria of 10 waterfowl harvested per square mile. A portion of these counties, however, are already designated as non-toxic shot zones, and so would not need additional monitoring studies.

(over)

Areas that have been monitored would be proposed for designation as non-toxic shot zones if 5 percent or more of the gizzards examined contain one or more ingested lead shot and if either blood samples or the lead content of liver tissue indicate a lead poisoning problem. For blood, lead poisoning would be indicated if 0.2 parts per million (ppm) lead are found in 5 percent or more of blood samples drawn from hunter-killed or live-trapped birds. Samples of liver tissue would indicate lead poisoning if 2 ppm lead are found in 5 percent or more of the liver tissues sampled (wet weight).

Within 90 days of determining that a triggering criterion has been met in a specific area, States should advise the Service that monitoring studies will begin within 1 year. If a State cannot meet that commitment, it should submit a monitoring schedule to the Service. This will allow States to establish priorities for conducting studies if they have a number of areas to monitor. States may also forego monitoring studies and ask the Service to propose non-toxic shot zones for any areas identified by the triggering criteria.

If the monitoring studies show that the decision criteria are not met, the area will be considered not to have a lead poisoning problem unless, at a later date, three or more dead waterfowl confirmed as lead poisoned are reported from the area. States may, however, decide to extend studies or re-monitor areas where initial monitoring studies indicate the decision criteria are not met. States may also monitor areas with fewer than 10 harvested ducks or geese per square mile.

The Service's proposal was published in the January 16, 1985, Federal Register. Also included in the document are the recommendations of representatives from the four Flyway Councils, made up of State wildlife agencies, regarding lead poisoning criteria. These recommendations differed in some respects from the Service's proposal. The major difference was that the Atlantic, Mississippi, and Central Flyways proposed that areas should be "triggered" if they have an average annual harvest of 5 waterfowl per square mile and one or more waterfowl diagnosed as having died from lead poisoning. The Pacific Flyway recommendations for both triggering and decision criteria differed from those of the other three flyways and from those being proposed by the Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Service believes implementation of the Flyways' recommendations would involve significant commitments of money and manpower in some States if all triggered areas are monitored. Because of the costs and personnel involved, the Service believes that somewhat less encompassing triggering criteria should be used initially. The Service believes that its proposal identifies those areas where serious lead poisoning of waterfowl is most likely to occur, and it would standardize the process throughout the United States.

Public comments on both the Service's proposed criteria and the Flyway recommendations are invited and should be submitted by February 22 to the Director (FWS/MBM0) U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.